The Pre-natal Baby

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The baby's body "started as a hair." After conception it was necessary that the father, with his semen during intercourse "strengthen" the baby. There was less, if any, intercourse in the last weeks of pregnancy, though no prohibition against it. Food eaten by the mother, "transformed into blood," built the baby's body. For the first 3 months the child was a "clump of blood." By the third month the mother felt a shaking (sàan) at the clump. This was the "khwan soul flitting in and out of the baby's heart." The picture of pre-natal growth was expressed by the chant at the tonsuring ceremony:

> "The body of a child inside its mother's womb grows gradually like droplets of oil coagulating at the end of the yak's hair. The 5 apertures appear, the nose, 2 ears, and 2 eyes; and then the hair, hands, and feet. The infant's hands embrace its placenta from which it sucks water day and night. There it sits on its mother's faeces while her newly eaten foods pack closely on its head. Its chin rests upon its knees, its face is turned toward the mother's back as it leans back against her belly. It looks like a monkey in the rain, sitting, waiting, trying to warm itself in a hole at the foot of a tree" (S.S.).

[826]

Before birth (and after), the baby was weak and tender (ɔ̀n), with especially soft, thin skin.

The Pregnant Woman

In pregnancy, a woman saw herself as moving toward the fulfillment of her long adumbrated female office[23] of nurturer. The essence of her femaleness, to be "soft and yielding, to lengthen life by nourishing others" was heightened.

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23. To paraphrase Fortes: "office," subsuming both status and role, means "calling, occupation, or life-task." It serves "instrumental or utilitarian ends," yet also has the "other dimension of duty and responsibility enjoined, sanctioned and above all symbolized in ceremonial or ritual forms placing it in the moral order" (Fortes:62).